State of Louisiana

Department of Environmental Quality

November 1, 2001

M.J. "Mike" Foster
Governor

Contact Jennifer Betbeze for more information: (225) 763-5680; e-mail:

J. Dale Givens
Secretary

LDEQ, PLAQUEMINE JOIN FORCES TO PROTECT WATER SUPPLY

NEW WELLS SERVE AS EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

BATON ROUGE – The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality and the City of Plaquemine today announced that they are working together to install a monitoring system that will ensure the integrity of the city's backup water supply wells.

"The sentinel wells will be installed in the vicinity of the City fire station to provide advance warning if contaminants approach the area," says Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality Dale Givens. "The department, local officials and national experts agree that it's critical we protect wells that have not been impacted. The sentinel well system along with the permanent monitoring system that is being established is essential to achieve this protection."

Since 1967, the City of Plaquemine has obtained its water from deep water supply wells located near Port Allen. Plaquemine used the wells located within the city as a backup supply. "In the past year the city refurbished the backup wells in efforts to prolong the life of the main supply wells in Port Allen. Since the discovery of vinyl chloride in the north Plaquemine area, it is imperative that we protect these auxiliary wells from possible contamination," says Plaquemine Mayor Tony Gulotta. Because Plaquemine has a high quality water supply, city officials are taking the proactive steps necessary to protect the quantity and quality of water it provides to its customers.

Since being notified of this issue in March of this year, LDEQ has spent in excess of a quarter of a million dollars in its efforts to identify the source, nature and extent of the contamination in the Plaquemine aquifer. The department has sampled 64 well locations, collected and analyzed over 250 samples and performed a detailed reconnaissance of historical activities in the area. The results indicate that the contamination is spread across a wide area at low levels. It is expected that these levels will decrease as natural degradation continues.

The department is planning to use a different strategy in its quest to find evidence that will lead to the source of the contamination. "We will start collecting supplemental geochemical and groundwater flow information which will give us more evidence to work with. This information will be reviewed not only by departmental scientists but also by national groundwater experts we have brought in to assist in this investigation," says Givens. "We are committed to this project. We will continue to take actions to ensure a clean water supply and attempt to identify the source of this environmental problem."

This new sampling program may provide information to better access whether multiple sources are present and whether significant biological breakdown of the contamination is occurring. The measurement of ethene, methane and ethane ratios in different areas may also provide the identification of signatures from different sources.

The next phase of the investigation is expected to take a significant amount of time and effort.